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The Urban Lab of Europe !

# The CoRE project Journal N° 3

*Project led by the City of Vienna*



**INTEGRATION OF  
MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES**



# The CORE Project

As a response to the dramatic increase in the number of refugees arriving 2015 in Vienna, posing huge challenges to social welfare and social housing systems as well as to the labour market, the CORE project aims at strengthening the whole integration system and at making it fit for new challenges. CORE develops and provides new integration offers, which address the needs of asylum seekers and refugees. CORE also contributes to the adaptation and optimisation of instruments and services in order to make them more user-oriented. Thanks to the innovations implemented within the project, existing ruptures and breaks in the integration process will be overcome.

The project firstly is an empowerment hub jointly planned, utilised and operated by public institutions, NGOs, civil society initiatives and refugees. By pooling resources and knowhow and by making refugees equal partners instead of passive beneficiaries, it helps to initiate smart transformation processes for the whole integration system. Secondly, a physical infrastructure in the form of a CORE building, which will be adapted to the needs of the project offering community spaces as well as service spaces. And thirdly, a think tank, which monitors, analyses, and innovates policies and develops and tests new solutions.

CORE's focus on skills and competences ensures that already during the asylum procedure, refugees' competences will be routinely assessed and documented in a newly developed data base. Activities in the field of career planning, competence development and specific trainings facilitate refugees' readiness for the labour market. As a result, refugees' preparation for the labour market starts already during the asylum procedure.

With a focus on peer mentoring and information offers in refugee's native languages, CORE ensures that asylum seekers' integration in Vienna starts right after they settle in Vienna. Thus, refugees will sooner be able to understand basic issues of life in Vienna, such as housing, education, health care, law, rules and codes for living in the city, etc.

Finally, CORE shows a wider public that - despite the existing challenges - integration of refugees can be successful and can add to the prosperity of the city. CORE contributes to making diversity a success in Vienna – by finding solutions to current challenges and by thinking ahead and therefore preparing the city for future challenges.

**Partnership:**

- Stadt Wien
- Fonds Soziales Wien - Public Agency
- Wiener ArbeitnehmerInnen Förderungsfonds - Public Agency
- Wirtschaftsagentur Wien - Business Support Agency
- Stadtschulrat für Wien - Europa Büro - Training Center

# Table of Contents

<b>1. Executive Summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Report on progress and activities</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1. Overview	7
2.2. Challenges	7
<b>3. In defensive</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1. A critical moment	9
3.2. CORE Centre as incubator for voluntary activity	10
3.3. Successful call for projects	12
3.4. A basic training program for volunteers	14
<b>4. Interfaces</b>	<b>15</b>
4.1. Challenges for volunteering in the field of asylum	15
4.2. Volunteering as a field of action: complex interrelations between local administration and civil society actors	15
4.3. Potentialities	16
<b>5. Conclusion, preview of Journal 4</b>	<b>18</b>

# 1. Executive Summary

This 3<sup>rd</sup> Journal of the CORE project is about the role and relevance of voluntary activity both from the angle of refugee (self-) empowerment, and the involvement of civil society. Volunteering and asylum is not in contradiction. Many refugees do practice volunteer work already while waiting for the asylum decision, be it within their community, or more formalized in the context of refugee- or non-refugee organisations. For many, this activity is part of a self-help practice and not considered as volunteering. And this is insofar correct, since volunteering can be defined as an activity which citizens do for others, unpaid and based on their free will.

Within the CORE-project, volunteering is seen as an important mean for becoming part of society. This is in line with the Viennese “integration from day one”-approach (see Journal 2), just as with the results of international research on the role and relevance of volunteering in the context of asylum. As studies show, volunteering contributes not only to the fight against social exclusion, racism and intolerance but also to the development of personal and professional skills and competences, and helps refugees to gain a more profound knowledge of the local and institutional environment. Volunteering is of particular relevance when access to labour market is restricted during their asylum procedure, as it is also the case in Austria. In such as context, volunteering opens a window of opportunity for carrying out employment-relevant activities in the framework of non-profit organizations or local authorities. For refugees with a recognized status, volunteering enhances social integration.

The CORE-project considers volunteer activity as beneficial for all people involved in it: for refugees just as for civil society activists, engaged in welcoming and hosting refugees, and in supporting them getting access to the diverse spheres of society. Volunteering brings people together, strengthens already existing ties, builds bridges and links, and creates new opportunities and spaces of action. That way, volunteering can be seen as a way that promotes integration as a two-way process. The term “two-way integration” underlines the idea that newcomers should not only be asked to adapt to the receiving society; it’s rather a question of how they can become equal citizens, and incorporated in a system of common belonging. Inclusion and emancipation are the key concepts, and volunteer activities do potentially enhance interaction and collaborative work, which is widely perceived as a main challenge in this regard.

However, there are important problems and challenges. On the one hand, most asylum seekers and refugees have a limited access to volunteer activities outside their communities. In this regard, more exchange between refugees, civil society (NGOs) and local authorities is needed. On the other hand, it is important to state that the general societal and political context has become more unfavourable for volunteering. This refers especially to the increasingly migrant- and asylum-hostile discourse in media and politics. The capacity of the civil society remains not unaffected from that.

UIA Journals give insights into the project’s development, also by highlighting facilitating and impeding aspects. Therefore, also the current

Journal is focusing on lessons learned. At the beginning, the reader will find a short report on activities and progress made by the project in the second half of 2018, and an overview of challenges the project implementation came across. The following chapters address specific challenges: *In defensive* refers to the increasing difficulties of civil society activism and the role

of the CORE Centre as counterforce. *Interfaces* reflects the relevance of, and the need for, more sustainable interlinkages between informal and formal structures and practices. *Potentialities* describes the resources refugees mobilise by carrying out volunteering activities. In conclusion, the reader will get a preview of next project steps and the content of journal 4.



*Langer Tag der Flucht – credits FSW Romesh Phoenix*

## 2. Report on progress and activities

### 2.1. Overview

In the second half of 2018, the CORE project effected important steps to fulfill its objectives: to successfully act as a facilitator for integration projects in Vienna, by applying the Viennese “integration from day one-approach”, and by targeting the different groups of asylum seekers and refugees.

On the one hand, the CORE-Centre finally developed in a way as it has been designed from the very beginning: as an incubator for self-organized, and low-threshold, participatory activities. In the second half of 2018, the CORE Centre developed to be a vivid place of activities, driven not only by the project partners, but of people with refugee background and also local volunteering activists. Furthermore, target group specific training and mentoring activities were carried forward, such as workshops for entrepreneurs, teachers and doctors, also new info modules were developed. Numerous events completed these main activities, ranging from the presentation of the OECD study “Working together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees”, in cooperation with the University of Economics and Business, lectures by foreign

experts to the continuous development of the digital service platform for refugees in Vienna - [www.refugees.wien](http://www.refugees.wien). The various CORE activities resulted in an increase in participation of the project’s target groups, as well as in high public interest and media coverage.

On the other hand, CORE launched successfully a series of calls for concepts. The calls for concepts addressed both self-organized, bottom up driven integration projects and projects addressing refugees in need of support in the field of housing. Concerning the housing issue, the aim was to receive innovative concepts, which address refugees who show a need of support and who either are unable to find housing himself or herself; or who live in precarious housing conditions; or who have already found housing but are in need of support in order to stabilize the housing situation or to avoid losing the housing. Concerning the first-mentioned issue, the aim was to support voluntary and civil society based activities. Section 3 and 4 of this journal will provide more details to these activities, and the challenges they address.

### 2.2. Challenges

The main challenges, the CORE project has to cope with in the second half of 2018, are a consequence of the political situation on national levels: In Austria, the federal government’s approach in asylum policies has become even more restrictive – accompanied by a profound changes in public opinion with increasing negative attitudes toward refugees

and asylum seekers. This results in a tightening of Austria’s asylum law, as well as in budget cuts for projects in the field of refugee aid and integration. As a result, the uncertainty that many asylum seekers and refugees face during their asylum procedure or while only being granted temporary protection is increasing. At the same time, several existing activities and offers for refugees were



stopped due to a lack of funding. As a result, the target groups' needs are changing. Thus, a challenge for CORE was to be flexible and to react to this changing demand. This was e.g. the case in the field of health promotion, where previously existing offers were stopped due to budget cuts, leaving an even bigger gap than before, in particular in the field of mental health support the consequences were dramatically. Thus, more attention was paid to this field of action and more budget than initially planned for activities in this field was spent.

Flexibility was also needed in view of the changing geopolitical situation and the subsequent decline in the number of refugees; in consequence, some offers, such as the information modules, had to be adapted in size and numbers.

A further challenge, related with a key objective of CORE, concerns the complex interactions between local administration and civil society actors. In its chapter 4, this journal pays particular attention to this issue.

Finally, the CORE-project seems to have found an excellent way to challenge the often-described difficulties of inter-sectoral cooperation. The projects efforts had been gratified with an award of city of Vienna ("Goldenes Staffelholz 2018"): Out of more than 120 applications, CORE convinced the jury with excellent cooperation among the project partners, also the innovative character of the project by strengthening a "bottom up" approach of governance, the active involvement and empowerment of the target group were decisive factors in favor of CORE to be finally awarded.



*You are welcome - credits FSW\_Romesh Phoenix*



## 3. In defensive

### 3.1. A critical moment

*“If civil society did not exist, the entire asylum system would have collapsed”.* This statement comes from an executive of a prominent Austrian non-profit-organisation, participating in a research on the role of volunteering in the so-called refugee crisis of 2015.<sup>1</sup>

The quote underlines the key role of civil society in addressing the challenges of immigration and integration, in particular in autumn and winter 2015, and with only slightly decreasing intensity in the following weeks and months. Civic engagement involved a wide range of organizations and, most notably, a huge number of volunteers: people of different ages and social backgrounds, students as well as elderly people, employed and unemployed, people with diverse interests and the common desire to oppose human suffering.

In 2015, the willingness to volunteer was unexpectedly high and important. Many volunteers acted self-organized and spontaneous, others helped within existing civil society organizations, some in newly founded grassroots associations. The areas of volunteering included all relevant tasks of civil society refugee work: from welcoming at the borders and railway stations to organisation of transport and sheltering, as well as medical aid and legal advice. Volunteers served as interpreters, organized German courses, build bridges to institutions, established social networks, or facilitated access to housing, in a word: they took a role of

mentoring, aiming to foster social integration, and to encourage social and cultural participation.

However, three years after the peak of refugee inflow, the environment has dramatically changed. As in many countries, also in Austria a profound shift can be observed: in public discourse that has become increasingly polarized, with regard to more and more negative attitudes toward refugees and asylum seekers, and as to the growing resonance of racism in the population as well.

Political discourse is affected by right wing populism, spreading feelings of insecurity and menace, and painting a negative image of civil society driven solidarity; the term “welcoming culture” has took on a pejorative meaning in public opinion. This profound change became particularly manifest in the context of election campaigns, such as, in Austria, the legislative election in autumn 2017 that brought a (far) right-wing majority. With the new federal government in December 2017, a coalition of conservative People’s Party and extreme right wing Freedom Party, the political environment changed fundamentally on national level. Since then, the situation is dominated by a vehement anti-immigration discourse, a tightening of immigration and asylum laws, faster expulsions of persons without legal status, and a policy of fear, e.g. by disseminating horror stories and biased data about the crime rate among asylum seekers. The general suspicion not only addresses immigrants,

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Simsa (ed.), Beiträge der Zivilgesellschaft zur Bewältigung der Flüchtlingskrise – Leistungen und Lernchancen. Forschungsbericht. Wien: WU 2016, S. 1.

asylum seekers and refugees but also civil society organizing support in the field of asylum.

As the CORE project started, in winter 2017, the situation was already in move; but there was good reasons to hope that the positive, constructive forces will prevail. The CORE project is designed as a way to strengthen the capacity of action - of public authorities and institutions, third sector organizations, civic associations, committed individuals - and thus to extend the opportunity of action on the whole; based on the “integration from day one-approach”, and accompanied by empowerment-concepts, peer-mentoring-programs, competence checks and trainings, a widespread information offer, etc., and all this in cross-sectoral collaboration and with the involvement of many volunteering people.

That way, the CORE project got to know, from its very beginning, the courage of those who continue to volunteer despite the increasing unfavourable political conditions, although the situation leave marks: growing discouragement and vulnerability, and a sense of fatigue that can be observed in almost all areas of action; a sentiment that particularly touches the many volunteers. Hostilities against the idealist “do-gooders” already existed in 2015 and 2016. But only recently we may note a radicalization in political beliefs and discourse. As a result of this shift, the work of volunteering in the field of asylum has become much more difficult. Many of them share the feeling of insecurity and frustration, of being pushed on the defensive,

and suffer from negative resentments and societal disregard.

However, volunteers do not just feel concerned by the changing political landscape and its societal consequences, also with regard to the public opinion. First of all, volunteers complain the increasingly harsh regulations in asylum, immigration and residence law, the reality of bureaucratic arbitrariness and institutional racism, or the lacking transparency of asylum procedures. Above that, volunteers are particularly concerned about the increasingly precarious situation of asylum seekers who do not only face more inhospitality in their everyday life, but who have a growing risk of a negative asylum decision or expulsion. At the same time, it is important to realize that the social and political change also has a direct impact on the target groups, e.g. due to the implementation of “temporary asylum” (limit on the right of residence to 3 years). The new situation thus leads to social withdrawal both of asylum seekers “on standby”, either because they are waiting for a decision or because they are in an act of appeal, or asylum seekers with negative decisions who, for factual reasons, cannot be deported, and the more established group of refugees with recognized status and/ or temporary right of residence. This means that it has become more and more difficult for organisations and activists who have been so far an important source of support, to get access to these groups and to stay in touch with them.

## 3.2. CORE Centre as incubator for voluntary activity

Located in the second floor of a modern office building, the CORE Centre offers a space created to host and to support social, cultural and training activities, launched by institutions and

organisations, private associations, volunteers, as well as by refugees themselves.

The urban setting of the CORE centre in the southern edge area of Viennese 15th district is

unique. The 15th district is Vienna's borough with the highest proportion of population of foreign origin. 54% of local population has migration background, mainly from Serbia, Turkey, Poland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Germany, Romania, Croatia, and Syria. Belted by inner-urban main arteries, the neighbourhood represents a typical Gründerzeit area. The local name *Storchengrund* ("ground of storks") refers to the river scenery and the period before urbanization. A site for small industries and enterprises in the early and mid-19th century, the area evolved later into a kind of "inner city periphery", with dilapidated residential homes, shabby hotels, and shadow activities such as prostitution or drug traffic. The mostly low standard apartments are preferably rented to immigrants, at the same time real estate business is gaining importance: rented flats are converted into residential property, with apartments sold overpriced and under obscure conditions in most cases. More recently, the neighbourhood is undergoing a process of refreshment, and a certain upgrading is to be observed: run-down buildings are being renovated or demolished, condominiums are being built and promoted as real estate investments, tourist infrastructures are being modernized, the public space embellished.

In a report on refugees and asylum seekers volunteering in the UK, Ruth Wilson and Hannah Lewis identify three forms of social capital<sup>2</sup>:

Whereas *bonding social capital* reflects the links within communities or groups, such as those within refugee communities, *bridging social capital* describes the links between

different communities or groups, for instance when different refugee communities form a partnership, or when networks are extended through refugee volunteering in non-refugee organisations; linking social capital, finally, concern linkages between people with different levels of power which might take place when a refugee or someone seeking asylum volunteers outside their community. Bonding social capital is said to be important for helping people to cope and 'get by'. Bridging and linking are seen as particularly useful for 'getting ahead'.

The CORE project is designed to create opportunities for all kind of *social capital building*: To give some examples: Peer-mentoring mainly strengthens the capacity of self-organisation (bonding); competence trainings and qualifications are generating bridge-building; and with its aim to connect people from different communities, groups and levels of power, the CORE Centre, as a physical facility, constitutes a potential resource for the production of bridging and linking social capital.

The CORE-project gives evidence that the growing uncertainty – reflecting both the unfriendly political climate as well as the increasing number of negative decisions and expulsions – has a disturbing impact both for asylum seekers and volunteers. Aware of this situation, the project team is constantly creating new opportunities for volunteer activities and encounters, starting from the provision of basic resources – a room for activities and meetings, provision of teaching and training material, possibilities for copying – right through the financial support for self-organized initiatives.

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<sup>2</sup> Ruth Wilson, Hannah Lewis (2006), *A Part of Society. Refugees and asylum seekers volunteering in the UK. A report based on case studies of ten organisations.* Leeds: Tandem.



*Nähwerkstatt – credits FSW\_Romesh\_Phoenix*

### 3.3. Successful call for projects

In that context, CORE has also organized ten calls for projects, targeting both organisations, associations, citizens, and refugees who are motivated to foster integration and self-help by means of empowerment and integration activities. The calls had different focuses with priorities on housing (“housing first”), health promotion, and social integration. The response to all calls had been excellent so far. Below some examples of projects based on volunteering activities:

- A local youth work initiative promoting peer mentoring in the field of football; goal of the project is to involve 150 young people;
- A project aiming at strengthening the self-competence of refugee adults through creative and artistic design, relaxing bodywork, excursions and cooking evenings; a group of ten refugees is addressed;
- A project inspired by the theatre of the oppressed, promoting the linguistic competence and social participation of refugee women through the joint development of a theatre piece; 20 women are designed to participate;
- “Human Voices” is encouraging adult refugees to use artistic methods to tell their own stories; the goal is to motivate up to 200 people to participate in the project;
- The project “Sustainable living in Vienna” addresses girls and women with refugee backgrounds; at least 12 people should be reached and enabled trained as multipliers, trained in reducing service charges
- “Space Buddies” is a project that brings together young refugees in vocational training and elderly citizens who worked in a similar



professional field; 20 young refugees shall be reached;

- “PlayTogetherNow” is addressing young adults to become football coaches; 50 young refugees are to be reached; in a separate program 20 young women will be encouraged to build up a football team;
- “Open Piano for Refugees” promotes social participation through music; up to 40 young people are involved in that project;
- “The Afghan Wulas Cultural Association” organises literacy course in Pashto; the project addresses 20-25 refugees who will be made literate in their native (first) language in order to be able to learn German in spoken and written;
- “Fremde werden Freunde” (“Strangers become friends”) is an initiative that will produce eight podcast contributions with the

involvement of five to eight refugees, providing knowledge on integration and inclusion related issues to refugees, social initiatives and volunteers as well; the podcasts shall finally reach up to 1500 people;

- A mentoring program to accompany children and their families with psychological support for the mentors; 12 children and their families are addressed;
- “WoWo 2.0”, a project that empowers the capacity of refugees on the housing market, supported by volunteers (“buddies”); 100 refugees shall be addressed;

Beside these initiatives, the CORE-centre hosts numerous activities based on principles of networking, exchange, and bridge construction. All of these projects and activities are basically functioning on the commitment of volunteer citizens and refugees.



*Deutschcafe, April 2018 – credits FSW\_Romesh\_Phoenix*

### 3.4. A basic training program for volunteers

With the aim to encourage citizens willing to volunteer in the field of asylum and refugee work, CORE organized in autumn a basic training for people interested in integration work and refugee aid. The (cost-free) training program included three days of transfer of knowledge and information, practical exercises, exchange of experiences, and awareness building. Divided in six modules, the training was held by distinguished and proficient experts. Their task was to give thematic inputs, to query necessary skills and competences, to evoke good examples, and to carry out practical knowledge.

The first module “Voluntarily Engaged - Motivated in Action” focused on the motivation for voluntary work. The two key questions to respond were: What motivates people to stand up for others? How can the willingness to volunteer be organized as appropriate for all participants?

The second module – “At Eye Level - Helping People to Integrate Well” – emphasized the necessity to get acquainted with the specific situation of people fleeing from disaster and war and searching refuge in a new country. A second objective was to reflect potential and limitations of the own role as volunteer in this specific field of action.

The third module – “Abroad – A New Home” – recalled Austria’s long migration history and its societal and cultural impact. Influences on both the host society and the people who find a new home here had been identified and discussed.

An additional module was dedicated to “Intercultural Communication - Many cultures, Many Forms of Communication”. Through brief

theoretical inputs and practical exercises of self-awareness, participants had been encouraged to engage with communication and its challenges, to reflect on own experiences, beliefs and attitudes, to slip into other roles and thereby to try new perspectives.

The fifth module took up legal issues of immigration and integration. Against the background of the Declaration of Vienna as a Human Rights City and in reflecting the EU Framework, this part of the training dealt with the legal foundations of immigration and asylum in Austria and showed the broad and diversified scale of political and social rights depending on immigration status. Furthermore, the naturalization law was elucidated and discussed. Participants had the opportunity to treat practical examples in the workshop. References to legal advice centers are provided.

The final module – titled “Diversity as an asset” – discussed the challenge of diversity in modern societies. Cities like Vienna are characterized by the juxtaposition of different views, attitudes, life plans, age groups and cultural backgrounds. What benefits can we - individually, as groups, and as a society as whole - draw from diversity?

Additionally, volunteers are solicited to participate in the program “freiwillig:info” and “freiwillig:dialog” organized by the Municipal Department “Integration and Diversity”, focusing on juridical knowledge, dealing with prejudices and stereotypes, communication skills, multilingualism, etc. Volunteers may also use the service of supervision to work on psychological stress and strains.



## 4. Interfaces

### 4.1. Challenges for volunteering in the field of asylum

As already mentioned, the challenges for volunteering in the field of asylum and refugee are huge and increasing. In a workshop with volunteers, organised by the CORE-team, the following critical aspects were mentioned:

First of all, more financial support and social protection (insurance) is needed. Volunteers are criticising the lack of access to public resources and funding, and that existing funding schemes do not respond to their needs. That's why they claim the need of basic funding to ensure the sustainability of their initiatives and activities.

Secondly, many activists express the need of social recognition with regard to their commitment in voluntary work. Many share a sentiment of frustration; they perceive that their civic involvement is not considered as relevant, and that only few people do care about

their work and concerns. There is a strong need for psychosocial support and supervision.

Thirdly, volunteers tell about new tasks. Legal assistance becomes more relevant. Thus, in a context with new regulations such as temporary asylum, a generally restrictive political and administrative practice with more negative decisions and more expulsions, juridical skills (legal assistance) gain more and more importance. Specific trainings are required.

CORE has developed three strategies to respond to these challenges: a series of calls for projects (see 1.2. CORE centre as incubator for volunteering activities); a specific training program for volunteers including supervision to cope with psychological stress and strains (see 1.3.), and new training and information modules based on the needs of volunteers who have changed with new legal and political developments.

### 4.2. Volunteering as a field of action: complex interrelations between local administration and civil society actors

One of CORE's key ambitions is to facilitate, and to improve, the inter-sectoral cooperation between administrative units of the city and the civil society (see Journal 1). This objective is of specific relevance with regard to the efficiency and efficacy of asylum and refugee work, and this concerns also the involvement of volunteers.

A main challenge is the asymmetric character of relations between local authorities and civil society actors. In particular volunteers, who do fundamental work on the grounds, feel rarely that the interactions with authorities are at eye

level. This is not only a question of unequal resources and power-relations. Also more formal civil society actors complain the lack of well-functioning hinges between administrative units and the (organized) civic society.

Experiences in 2015 and after draw a contradictory picture: Whereas in situations of need for urgent action, the cooperation functions amazingly well, driven by a spontaneous commitment of individual actors, stable and consistent "system bridges" are missing. This becomes particularly clear in the context of the need for a body that is

in charge, and responsive to asylum seekers and refugees regardless their changing status. People who are looking for refuge in another country are changing their legal status in the course of their stay and during the asylum procedure. Their legal status may be that of an asylum seeker, a person with subsidiary protection status, or a recognized refugee, and sometimes the status may not be clear at all.

A main problem, and challenge, is the missing responsibility in cases of changing status. This situation deepens the social vulnerability of the

### 4.3. Potentialities

The CORE project is supporting many volunteering activities that are developed and organized by refugees themselves. A wide range of activities driven by volunteering refugees are taking place in the CORE-centre: women and men who are cooking, tailoring, or producing and garnishing bags; men and women sharing interests in artistic activities; a woman who is organizing by herself a course in Arab language for children; young refugees doing photography, film and media work; refugee doctors who are organizing learning groups and serve as mentors for others in procedure of recognition of academic certificates; refugees who love to play chess and organizing chess events; young and adults interested in football and other sport activities, and so on<sup>3</sup>.

In continuous exchange with the active refugees, the CORE project learns a lot from the value of volunteering. For many volunteering is a possibility to try something new, to get in contact with Austrian society, or to bridge the uncomfortable time of waiting during the asylum procedure. The positive experiences are one

target group. Asylum seekers, persons with subsidiary protection status, recognized refugees are not only a legal category or target of humanitarian action, but people with all their needs. In the workshop with volunteers, organised by the CORE-team, participants developed the idea to establish a kind of clearing house for people looking for refuge in Vienna, responsive for all, independently from their legal status or typology. Needless to say that this facility would need a provision of human resources and expert knowledge

important reason that established refugees become main pillars of civil society driven activities in the field of refugee work: Today, around the half of all activities in the field of asylum and refugee work are organized by people who themselves have witnessed asylum.

However, the willingness to volunteer is determined by different circumstances. There is, on the one hand, the somehow frightening political atmosphere and anti-migration discourse. And there is, on the other hand, the increasingly restrictive reality with more negative decisions and expulsion in case of refusal. Negative decisions concern at the moment a majority of applications for asylum from people from Afghanistan. However, many decisions are inadequate and make use of bizarre arguments, so 40 percent of first-instance decisions are revised. The people concerned respond differently to this situation. The CORE-team has identified three strategies: resignation, voluntary return, or wait and see (after 5 years of residence immigrants have, under certain conditions, the chance to obtain a permanent residency status).

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<sup>3</sup> See the project website <https://www.refugees.wien>

In any case, the current context has a negative impact on the readiness of people to take an active role.

The situation is nevertheless contradictory, and this applies especially to people applying for asylum and waiting for the decision. The increasing uncertainty and unfriendliness in society cause mistrust, social distance, and discouragement (see also Journal 2). Also among those who volunteer, discomfort spreads, also because they are suspected to do undeclared work, even though their activity is one legally accepted way to participate in society.

In general, labor market access for asylum seekers is considerably restricted in Austria. One of the rare possibilities to work is in the context of non-profit/public service activities. The Vienna Social Fund, a main partner in the CORE project, is supporting this kind of employment by providing positions in municipal departments and organizational units of the City of Vienna. Some hundreds of refugees got the chance to find work that way. In addition to these activities, asylum seekers, after a three-month stay, have the right to work in selected fields such as tourism and agriculture (short-term seasonal and harvest work) or in private households but only to

a certain (restrictive) income limit. Non-profit/public service activities are also allowed in asylum accommodations (e.g. translation, cleaning, kitchen operation, maintenance). However, this kind of activity is only permitted if it does not replace a regular job. Asylum seekers receive a remuneration for non-profit/public service activities, which may not exceed 200€ per month.

The main concern of the CORE-project in promoting volunteering activities is to find functional and sustainable forms of self-organization. While the CORE project supports volunteers' activities e.g. through the provision of space, equipment and organizational support at the CORE Centre, or by offering funding as part of the calls for projects, additional support beyond the CORE project is needed. To ensure the durability of initiatives and activities, a sustainable basic financial support is required. In many contexts, also additional physical facilities are needed: Access to sport facilities, provision of premises, and availability of work material. One option may be the temporary use of vacancies: premises provided in solidarity for low or even no additional costs. One way how people can appropriate urban space, and shape their city

## 5. Conclusion, preview of Journal 4

The following months will come up with a continuation of already started, and an implementation of newly developed activities, strengthening the role of the CORE-Centre as hub of self-organized, bottom-up driven activities. In addition, the first months of 2019 are already dominated by the discussion and securing of

project success beyond the approaching end of the project, and in favor of the target groups.

Journal 4 will give focus on field of action that has been less in the focus so far: professional trainings for specific target groups, and inputs to improve the chances of successful school careers for young refugees.

Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) is an Initiative of the European Union that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges. Based on article 8 of ERDF, the Initiative has a total ERDF budget of EUR 372 million for 2014-2020.

UIA projects will produce a wealth of knowledge stemming from the implementation of the innovative solutions for sustainable urban development that are of interest for city practitioners and stakeholders across the EU. This journal is a paper written by a UIA Expert that captures and disseminates the lessons learnt from the project implementation and the good practices identified. The journals will be structured around the main challenges of implementation identified and faced at local level by UIA projects. They will be published on a regular basis on the UIA website.



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